



## Caring for Your Child's Teeth - 24 to 36 Months

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Starting good brushing habits **early** is critical in building a healthy smile in your child.

### Why are baby teeth so important?

Baby teeth, also known as primary teeth, serve as “placeholders” for adult (secondary) teeth. If they are lost too early, due to tooth decay, the remaining teeth can shift and block adult teeth from coming in. Decay in baby teeth can cause pain, affect speech development and may make eating painful - resulting in poor nutrition. If left untreated, tooth decay can spread and result in life-threatening infection.

### What steps should I take to protect my child?

- **Brush!** - at least two times per day! Give your toddler the power to choose his or her own soft bristle tooth brush. They will be more interested in brushing if they pick it out. Encourage your now, much more independent child, to brush on her own. Use positive reinforcement and compliment often on a job well done. However, to make sure your child's teeth are clean, you should brush them again.  
  
The easiest way to brush the teeth of your toddler is to come from behind and brush the toddler's teeth like they were your own. Having the child face the same direction as you, makes it easier than attempting to brush from the front. You will also have more control if the child is unwilling to cooperate by using your other arm to stabilize the child.
- **Use fluoride toothpaste:** As soon as your child can spit, you can begin using fluoride toothpaste. Teach your child not to swallow it. Use only a pea-sized amount or less and smear the paste into the bristles. If your child does not like the taste, try a different flavor or have them continue to use water.
- **Begin flossing:** As soon as 2 or more teeth are touching, it is time to begin flossing, Your Pediatric Dentist will provide you with special flossers and techniques to make this easier than it sounds. Floss you child's teeth once a day after they have eaten their last meal.
- **Continue your dental checkups:** Frequent checkups will help to prevent tooth decay. We recommend a cleaning, exam and fluoride varnish every 6 months.
- **Be a good role model:** Children learn from modeling. Let your child watch you and older siblings brush and floss. With good habits at home and frequent checkups, your child can have a beautiful, healthy smile for a lifetime!!!

### Home can I find out more about protecting my toddler's oral health?

We, at Pediatric Dentistry of Clifton Park, are here to answer any questions or concerns you may have. Your child's oral health is our priority!

Sources: Infant Oral Health Guide; Children's Hospital Boston Children's Hospital Primary Care clinic; Wanessa Risko, MD, ScD, Romi Webster, MD MPH, Man Wai Ng, DDS MPH, 9-2006; How to Prevent Tooth Decay in Your Baby; American Academy of Pediatrics, copyright 2007; First Steps to a Healthy Smile; American Academy of Pediatrics, copyright 2008